

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 /068 W
-----037397 062241Z /64

P R 062144Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1490
INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY QUITO
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
DIA WASHDC
USCINSCO J2 QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LA PAZ 5312

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, BL
SUBJECT: PEREDA HEAVILY FAVORED AS BOLIVIANS READY FOR JULY
9 ELECTIONS

1. SUMMARY: AS BOLIVIANS PREPARE TO GOTO THE POLLS ON JULY 9,
THERE IS A BROAD CONSENSUS THAT JUAN PEREDA WILL EMERGE VICTOR
IN THE CONTEST FOR THE PRESIDENCY. OPINIONS VARY, HOWEVER, ON
WHETHER HE WILL GARNER A MAJORITY OF THE POPULAR VOTE OR BE
SELECTED BY THE NEW CONGRESS. LESS CLEAR IS WHICH OF THE TWO
MAJOR OPPOSITION CANDIDATES--VICTOR PAZ ESTENSSORO OR HERNAN
SILES ZUAZO--IS LIKELY TO EMERGE WITH A DOMINANT SHARE OF
THE CONGRESSIONAL MINORITY. PAZ' CAMPAIGN, PARTICULARLY IN
THE HOMESTRETCH, HAS NOT LIVED UP TO EXPECTATIONS, BUT
HIS RESIDUAL STRENGTH IN RURAL AREAS KEEPS HIM FROM BEING
COUNTED OUT. SILES HAS RUN A MORE ENERGETIC CAMPAIGN, AND WOULD
WELL WIN MOST OF THE MINORITY SEATS. RENE BERNAL, WHO HAS
RUN WELL IN ORURO AND COCHAMBAMBA, WILL ALSO ALMOST CERTAINLY
BE REPRESENTED IN THE CONGRESS.

2. LOOKING BACK OVER THE CAMPAIGN PERIOD, MOST OBSERVERS
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AGREE THAT OPPOSITION CANDIDATES HAVE HAD MORE FREEDOM OF ACTION
THAN ANYTIME SINCE THE INTRODUCTION OF UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE
APPROXIMATELY 26 YEARS AGO. BARRING EGREGIOUS FRAUD, WE
BELIEVE THAT THE 1978 ELECTIONS WILL PRODUCE A GOVERNMENT MOST
BOLIVIANS CAN ACCEPT--AND SUPPORT--AS LEGITIMATE. END SUMMARY.

3. WITH BOLIVIA'S JULY 9 GENERAL ELECTIONS TWO DAYS OFF, VIRTUALLY

ALL KNOWLEDGEABLE OBSERVERS AGREE THAT CONTINUITY CANDIDATE JUAN PEREDA COMMANDS INSURMOUNTABLE ADVANTAGES IN THE RACE FOR THE PRESIDENCY. WITH A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF THE VOTING POPULATION STILL APPARENTLY UNCOMMITTED, HOWEVER, IT REMAINS AN OPEN QUESTION WHETHER PEREDA CAN GARNER A MAJORITY (FIFTY PERCENT PLUS ONE) OF THE POPULAR VOTE, AND THUS PREVENT THE CONTEST FROM BEING DECIDED BY THE NEW CONGRESS. BASED ON OUR RECENT OBSERVATIONS IN ALL BOLIVIAN DEPARTMENTS EXCEPT TARIJA, WE BELIEVE IT LIKELY THAT PEREDA WILL WIN BETWEEN 45 AND 60 PERCENT OF THE VOTE NATIONWIDE AND HAVE LITTLE DIFFICULTY ACHIEVING A COMFORTABLE MAJORITY IN THE CONGRESS. PEREDA APPEARS WEAKEST IN THE DEPARTMENTS OF POTOSI, ORURO, AND TARIJA, BUT COULD QUITE CONCEIVABLY WIN THEM ALL.

4. LESS CERTAIN IS WHETHER THE SLATE HEADED BY VICTOR PAZ ESTENSSORO OR HERNAN SILES ZUAZO WILL DOMINATE THE CONGRESSIONAL MINORITY. ALTHOUGH IT INITIALLY APPEARED THAT PAZ WOULD MOUNT A STRONG CAMPAIGN, HIS IMPACT ON THE POPULAR IMAGINATION HAS NOT LIVED UP TO EXPECTATION. POLLS IN THE CITIES OF LA PAZ COCHABAMBA (RELIABILITY UNCERTAIN), FOR EXAMPLE, SHOW HIM TRAILING RENE BERNAL AND SILES BY WIDE MARGINS. PAZ IS UNDOUBTEDLY STRONGER IN RURAL AREAS, HOWEVER, AND COULD THUS STILL WIN A SIGNIFICANT SHARE OF THE OPPOSITION SEATS. PAZ' FLAGGING CAMPAIGN HAS PROVOKED RUMORS THAT HE MAY WITHDRAW HIS CANDIDACY AT THE LAST MOMENT, BUT THESE HAVE BEEN STOUTLY DENIED BY HIS CAMP, AND WE HAVE NOT

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BEEN ABLE TO FIND ANY SUBSTANTIATION FOR THEM.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 LA PAZ 5312

5. HERNAN SILES' PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN MORE IMPRESSIVE. WELL FINANCED AND ENERGETICALLY SUPPORTED BY THE LEFTIST MIR AND THE MOSCOW-LINE COMMUNISTS, SILES APPEARS TO HAVE GAINED SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT IN KEY URBAN AREAS LIKE LA PAZ, POTOSI AND COCHABAMBA. WARNED THAT HIS PRESENCE COULD PROVOKE VIOLENCE, HOWEVER, SILES DID NOT MAKE HIS SCHEDULED APPEARANCE IN SANTA CRUZ ON JULY 1, AND THAT DEPARTMENT WOULD APPEAR TO BE TOTALLY BEYOND HIS GRASP. RENE BERNAL HAS FOCUSED HIS ENERGY AND RESOURCES CHIEFLY ON THE DEPARTMENTS OF ORURO AND COCHABAMBA, AND COULD WELL EMERGE WITH THE CONGRESSIONAL MINORITY IN BOTH.

6. LOOKING BACK OVER THE CAMPAIGN PERIOD, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE OPPOSITION CANDIDATES HAVE SUFFERED DISADVANTAGES VIS-A-VIS JUAN PEREDA. PEREDA HAS HAD ALMOST EXCLUSIVE ACCESS TO THE STATE-CONTROLLED BOLIVIAN TV; HE HAS HAD THE VEILED SUPPORT OF THE MILITARY AND THE ORGANS OF GOVERNMENT; HIS CAMPAIGN, PARTICULARLY TOWARD THE END, HAS BEEN BETTER FINANCED THAN ANY OF THE OTHERS(ALTHOUGH SILES IS ALSO WELL FINANCED). IN CONTRAST, HIS OPPONENTS HAVE EXPERIENCED RESISTANCE--SOME OF IT APPARENTLY INSPIRED BY OVERLY ENTHUSIASTIC LOCAL GOVERNMENT
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OFFICIALS--IN THEIR CAMPAIGN SWINGS. SOME EXAMPLES: BERNAL'S INITIAL RALLY IN ORURO WAS DISRUPTED BY A SUSPICIOUS POWER OUTAGE; SILES' PLANNED DEMONSTRATION IN THE COCHABAMBA TOWN OF UCURENA (WHERE THE AGRARIAN REFORM ACT WAS SIGNED IN 1953) FAILED TO MATRERIALIZE WHEN PRO-PEREDA PEASANT GROUPS BLOCKED OFF THE ACCESS ROADS; PAZ' AIRCRAFT WAS PREVENTED FROM LANDING IN COBIJA, CAPITAL OF THE PANDO, AND RIBERALTA, IN THE BENI, BECAUSE THE LANDING STRIPS WERE BLOCKED BY HEAVY MACHINERY. IN ADDITION, VIRTUALLY ALL OPPOSITION GROUPS HAVE COMPLAINED OF OFFICIAL HARASSMENT (INCLUDING BRIEF DETENTIONS) OF THEIR CAMPAIGN WORKERS, PARTICULARLY IN THE RURAL AREAS.

7. DESPITE THESE IMPEDIMENTS, HOWEVRER, THERE IS WIDESPREAD AGREEMENT THAT OPPOSITION CANDIDATES HAVE ENJOYED MORE FREEDOM OF ACTION THAN IN ANY ELECTION CAMPAIGN SINCE THE INTRODUCTION OF UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE ABOUT 26 YEARS AGO. ACCORDING TO PERMANENT ASSEMBLY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PRESIDENT FATHER JULIO TUMIRI (WHO IS NO FRIEND OF THE BANZER REGIME), OPPONENTS OF THE GOVERNMENT HAVE HAD FAR FREER ACCESS TO RURAL AREAS THAN DURING THE MNR AND BARRIENTOS PERIODS. ALSO, THEY HAVE HAD NO

DIFFICULTY IN PRESENTING THEIR VIEWS IN THE NEWSPAPERS AND ON THE RADIO, AND THEIR PROPAGANDA HAS BEEN LIBERALLY PLASTERED OR PAINTED ON CITY WALLS.

8. IN CONCLUSION, BOLIVIA'S DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS HAS NOT BEEN JEFFERSONIAN PURE, BUT IT APPEARS TO REPRESENT A SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT OVER THE PAST. OPPOSITION CANDIDATES, ESPECIALLY ON THE EXTREME LEFT, ARE ALREADY MAKING EXAGGERATED CLAIMS OF ELECTORAL IRREGULARITIES. BARRING EGREGIOUS FRAUD ON JULY 9, HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE THE ELECTIONS WILL PRODUCE A GOVERNMENT MOST BOLIVIAN CAN ACCEPT-AND SUPPORT-AS LEGITIMATE.
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